

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1965

Vol. 16, No. 5

NEW COMPLETE NOVELET

THE HICK FUZZ

by ED LACY

Police Chief Bordon had a harsh way of enforcing the letter of the law. But a harsh man can sometimes strike a hard blow at cruelty and injustice.

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, VOL. 16, No. 5. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. 160 W. 46th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, 12 issues \$6.00; 24 issues \$12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1965, by RENOWN PUBLICATION, INC. All rights reserved. April, 1965. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 160 W. 46th St., New York, New York. 10036.

Mr. Policeman



by JACK RITCHIE

IN THIS PART of the city we walk in pairs. If Chief Noonan could have his way, he'd put only negro cops here. He claims they understand the people better. They're more respected. That's what he says.

But there aren't enough to go around and so he does the next best thing, according to his book. He pairs them off with whites.

After roll call, Tommy Dade and I left the station and walked to the beginning of our beat at seventh.

It was a hot night with scarce breezes from the big lake. Tommy walked slow and easy and he smiled to himself. He was new on the force and young and he sniffed the air as though he enjoyed it.

I pointed to the dirty gutter with

my nightstick. "That's what I smell, Tommy boy. Nothing else."

His smile was patient. "Don't let the bitterness get you, Frank. Take things as they come."

We were looking for Gillie Jones and so was every other cop in the city. But especially the ones in this ward. Gillie would stick out like a sore thumb if he went beyond Eighteenth street.

Two nights ago he'd been helping himself to a stack of used tires at a closed gasoline station when Blanchard and Kaminsky interfered.

Kaminsky was dead now. He left a wife and two kids and Kaminsky was a white cop.

The dark people sat on their porches and steps or walked without haste in the shadows of the

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Anger and violence can make the pursuit of a killer hazardous . . . even in broad daylight. And the cops had more than night's sinister shadows to worry about.

night. They talked softly and laughed and then they were silent until we passed.

We turned down Chestnut where the sidewalks were lighted by the windows of the taverns, the hat-cleaning shops, and the fried chicken houses.

And here they leaned against the buildings and watched us, their faces expressionless. When they had to move aside, they did it slow.

The Ivory Coast Bar was thick with customers and the juke music played a bad second to the talk. We stood inside the doorway in the haze of smoke and the smell of spilled beer. The talk softened and they watched us, waiting to see what we wanted.

Behind the bar Big Mac licked his lips and began wiping the wetness off the hard wood.

I smiled slightly and went over to him. "Is there something you might want to tell me, Mac?"

His eyes flicked to the customers and then back to me. He shook his head. "I don't know a thing about Gillie. I ain't seen him for a week."

He grinned slyly at the brown people and spoke louder. "No, sir, Mr. Policeman. I just don't have no idea where that hero boy could be."

The bar was clean now and I leaned on it. "I'm always around, Mac. I'd hate to find out you're lying. That would kind of upset me."

When we were outside, Tommy Dade spoke as though he were trying to convince himself. "You can't blame them. They distrust policemen. Where most of them came from a policeman was somebody from another world and it wasn't their world."

We waited for the light on fourth and then stepped out into the street. My eyes went over the faces we passed. "Twenty years ago there were only a couple of hundred in the whole city. Today there are twenty-five thousand."

Tommy stepped up on the sidewalk. "They came up here because this was a better place to be."

We turned down the quiet side street that needed more lighting—one of the streets that sober whites avoided after dark.

In the middle of the second block we climbed up the crumbling cement steps of what had been the Graham mansion twenty years ago. A dozen men and women lounged on the big porch, some of them in creaking wicker chairs and others against the sagging railing.

I stopped next to the heavy woman at the big double doors. "Where's Ruby?"

She shrugged her big shoulders. "Maybe upstairs." Her teeth showed white in a grin. "You expect to find Gillie up there? He smarter than that."

"We're just checking again, Mrs. Neal," Tommy said.

She grinned wider and her body

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shook with a chuckle. "You real polite for a policeman."

The wide marble staircase to the second floor was dirty and worn in the center of each step. The hall was musty with perfume and dust and the odors of cooking grease.

I stopped at the third door and put my hand on the knob.

Tommy touched my arm and shook his head. He smiled apologetically and then knocked.

Ruby Gannet took her time about coming to the door. She leaned against the doorway, one hand on her hips. She was tawny brown and sullenness glowed in her eyes.

"Gillie's not here," she said. "Did you expect him to be?"

I put my foot over the doorsill. "We don't expect anything. We just make sure."

She didn't budge. "I'd like to see a warrant. You got one of those, Mr. Policeman?"

I smiled and showed her my open hand. "Is that enough? Would you like to read it closer?"

Behind me Tommy coughed and his fingers found my elbow. I shrugged him off and kept looking at Ruby. She met my eyes defiantly for ten seconds, then shrugged and walked inside.

It was a large high-ceilinged room with a blocked-up fireplace at one end. When the Wilfred Grams lived here, this had been their eldest son's room.

The ornate brass bedstead was still there, but scarred with knicks and scratches. A rusty gas plate stood on a shelf nailed to the dark oak paneling.

I flipped open the strap on my holster and moved to the closet. Standing to one side, I pulled open the door.

The long, deep room was filled with satiny dresses, mostly lavender, and the floor was a litter of shoes, boxes, stacks of confession magazines, and long dead bottles.

Ruby grinned when I came out. "Now try under the bed."

Tommy Dade was the nearest. Embarrassment showed on this face, but he stooped down and took a look.

Ruby laughed softly. "Don't let the dust scare you."

Tommy got to his feet looking sheepish and dusted his knees.

I ran my fingers over the fireplace mantle and regarded the dirt for a moment. "All right, Ruby. We get the general idea that Gillie's not here. But we also have the little bitty feeling that you just might know where he is."

Ruby found a pack of cigarettes and tapped one out. "Why the hell should I know where he is? I'm not his keeper."

I studied her. "Gillie killed a man. Anybody who helps him now answers for it. You never liked the county jail too much. Think of how ten years upstate would wear on you."



Her eyes became sulky. "You cops picked on Gillie all the time. He was never real bad. Just a few little things."

"Sure," I said. "And the little things became murder."

She watched me move around the room. The green marble clock was still there, but it wasn't running. The key was missing too.

Ruby ground her cigarette into the floor with her toe. "So another cop dies. Why should I cry about it?"

I turned and moved toward her but Tommy got in front of me. "Take it easy, Fred."

Ruby turned her back on us. "Put a uniform on a man and he thinks he's God."

There was a soft knock on the door. I slipped out my .38 and turned the knob.

The tall loose-jointed man stared at my uniform and then at

the gun. He swallowed. "Guess I got the wrong place."

Ruby's voice came over my shoulder. "Come back in fifteen minutes, Hank."

He nodded and disappeared from the doorway.

I grinned at Ruby. "You didn't waste any time finding somebody else. Or was that just one of your customers?"

Her voice was bored. "Why don't you get the hell out of here?"

Downstairs I paused for a moment at the tall double doors to one side. "That used to be the music room, Tommy."

On the porch Mrs. Neal still rocked back and forth in her chair. She grinned. "You got hard luck, Mr. Policeman. You don't find no Gillie and we all feel real sorry for you."

When we stepped onto the sidewalk, I turned to look at the Graham place once more. It was a big tired house now and forty people lived in it. In the old days there had been only eight, and four of those were servants. And there had been a green lawn once too, but now there was only hard-packed earth.

"Tommy," I said. "I was born in that house. I lived there until I was twelve years old."

He stared at me uncertainly.

I grinned and started walking.

By midnight the side streets were almost deserted and we walked silently in their dimness.

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Ahead of us I noticed two men under a lamp post. They were talking softly, but their conversation stopped as we approached.

I recognized Sam Barker, but the bull-shouldered man was new to me. I stopped in front of them. "You two got no homes to go to?" I asked.

The big man smiled faintly, but his eyes remained blank. "I'm free and over twenty-one. I like standing here. Is there some kind of curfew for people like me?"

I looked him over, but still couldn't place him. "Put your hands over your head," I snapped. "Both of you."

There was a clatter of metal in the gutter behind them. I turned on my flashlight and the beam picked out a pearl-handled switch knife.

I hefted it and snapped out the five-inch blade. "Which one of you belongs to this?"

I didn't get any answer.

I walked to the sewer grating fifteen feet away. The knife made a plopping noise as it dropped into the water.

There was a soft curse I could barely make out.

I came back and smiled. "Like I said. Put your hands over your head."

Sam put his hands up, but bull-neck didn't. His mouth moved and he was going to spit. I grabbed a fistful of his nylon shirt and pulled him close.

"Go ahead, big boy," I said. "But you'll never smile pearly white again."

He met my eyes and he wasn't afraid of the man in front of him. But the man was wearing a uniform and that made a difference. He could take you to a police station and turn you over to people who would knock you from one wall to the other. He knew that was true because of what everybody told him.

His hands went above his head, but he didn't hurry it.

His wallet told me that his name was Raff Hoggins. He carried a pocket knife, but the blade was less than three inches long and that made it legal to carry.

Sam wasn't carrying any at all and I grinned at him. "I guess you'll have a little trouble fishing yours out of the sewer. It looked so expensive too."

His lean dark face was patiently sad and he said nothing.

"Sam," I said softly. "You and Gillie once in a while walked through the same doorways. Maybe you could tell me where he is now?"

Sam Barker licked his lips. "No," he said, and then added, "Sir."

I looked at Tommy. "I guess we could arrange for Sam to talk in private. Let's call it resisting an officer. That ought to get him thirty days with the record he's got."

But Tommy didn't show a play-

along smile. He didn't like what I was saying. Even if I didn't mean it.

I turned back to Sam and Raff. "All right. Get the hell out of here."

They moved on and I started walking in the opposite direction.

Tommy caught up with me. "You can't blame them for feeling sore. Nobody likes to be stopped on the street and treated like he was a criminal."

I could hear the irritation in my voice. "People get searched by cops in the white neighborhoods too. Does that make you feel any better?"

At one o'clock we stopped at the call box to report in and then went on to Sukey's *All-Nite* for a cup of coffee.

We took two stools at the empty counter. Birdie Yates stayed at the cash register talking to a man in a yellow shirt.

Tommy Dade settled himself to wait. He studied the signs on the wall behind the counter.

I lit a cigarette, took a couple of puffs, and then swiveled the stool. "Get the lead out, Birdie, and draw two cups of coffee."

Her face slipped to sullenness, but she did as she was told.

I sipped the coffee. "I hear you go to law school nights, Tommy."

He smiled slightly. "There's nothing like ambition."

I grinned. "I'm loaded with it too. I'd like to be chief of police,

but I don't think I'll make it."

Tommy caught Birdie's eye. "I'd like a piece of that lemon pie, Miss."

"The same for me," I said. "And don't die of old age while you're getting it."

She brought over the two saucers and put them on the counter. Her hand went to her hip. "I ain't heard a thing about you big policemen getting poor little Gillie."

I glanced up. "Don't brood about it, Birdie."

She sniffed. "You won't get Gillie. He too smart."

"That's right," I said. "The brainy type that kills a man for twenty dollars worth of used tires." I picked up my fork and tried the pie. "Gillie can't leave this part of the city, this little town within a city. He can't take a bus, or a train, and there are eighty miles of white faces between him and the next place he can hide."

When we finished, I got up and headed for the door.

Tommy stayed at the counter. "You forgot to pay the lady."

I smiled faintly. "So I did." I found some change and tossed it on the counter.

Tommy followed me out and closed the door. "You take apples from the fruit stands too?"

"By the bagful," I said.

High in the sky heat lightning veined the darkness for a moment. We walked through the islands of light at the taverns and listened to

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At Third we turned into the rose aroma of the sweet bay trees next to what had been the Banning's coachhouse and later their garage.

As we started down the long slope, I touched Tommy's arm and stopped. He looked at me uncertainly as I pulled him into the shadows of a maple.

I pointed to the foot of the hill at the shadow that moved along the line of cars parked at the curb.

Tommy's eyes narrowed. "It looks like somebody trying to find a car with the ignition key in it."

We waited and watched the dark form glide silently from one car to another, pausing at each for a few seconds to peer inside.

When he came under the weak street lamp, I put my lips close to Tommy's ear. "That's our Gillie. The neighborhood hero is looking for transportation out of here."

I slipped the revolver out of my holster. "Let him get a little closer. And then don't worry about his civil rights. Try to think about what happened to Kaminsky."

We let Gillie get to within twenty feet of us before we stepped out of the shadows.

When Gillie heard us coming, it was too late. His eyes widened at the sight of our .38's and he froze.

His hands went up immediately, but I could read it in his moving eyes that he was going to make a break if he got half a chance.

And that chance came faster

than he could have hoped for. Tires screamed as a night joy rider swung his car around the corner. Headlights flashed into our eyes and that was all that Gillie needed.

He dived between two of the parked cars and headed fast for the alley.

Tommy's gun fired at the sky. "Stop!" he shouted.

And that's what we're supposed to do—according to the regulations. We're supposed to give warning and fire at the empty heavens three times before we got down to business.

But Gillie was four seconds away from escape into the darkness and I couldn't go according to the slow book. I leveled my gun quickly and fired.

Gillie went down like he'd been pushed and he hit the sidewalk hard.

Beside me, Tommy's voice was a whispered shock. "My, God! You killed him!"

I moved cautiously over to Gillie, bent over him, and pulled the automatic out of his back pocket.

Gillie was alive, but unconscious. My bullet had plowed a furrow along his skull, but as far as I could see it had done no more damage than to expose four inches of gray-white bone.

Lights began flashing on in the houses along the street and there was the sound of voices in the night.

Gillie moaned and in half a minute I had him sitting up. It looked to me like Gillie's fall had done more harm than my bullet. A couple of his front teeth were missing and a few more were loose. His face was raw and bloody from abrasions.

The dark people were leaving houses now, the men buttoning shirts, and a few women in dressing gowns straggled behind them.

I pulled Gillie to his feet and began putting the chain on his right wrist, but he screamed in pain. I threw the beam of my flashlight on his hand and saw that the wrist was broken.

The first of the people were here now. They stopped and watched and they were joined by others.

I linked the chain around Gillie's other wrist. "All right, Gillie. Start walking."

Beside me, Tommy uneasily eyed the silent faces surrounding us.

They moved before us, grudgingly, and then they followed—on the sidewalks, on the street, and on the dust where the grass should have been.

We began hearing the voices of hate. *The dirty fuzz beat up on Gillie. They nearly kill Gillie.*

Tommy Dade tried to act like a defense lawyer. "He fell. He fell. We didn't touch him."

"Shut up," I said. "No use talking."

They began to jostle us now and

the curses grew louder and bolder. Gillie dragged his feet, a sly gleam in his eyes. He moaned and swayed.

The sea of dark faces loomed more solid between us and the call box. I used my shoulder, but got pushed back and almost went down.

The piercing voice of a woman cut through the low growls. "Kill the dirty fuzz!" she screamed.

She stood in the lighted doorway of what had been the Evans house, her body tall and gaunt. Her eyes rolled with hate and her big hands began the beat of a chant.

I shoved my club under my belt and pulled out the service revolver. The front of the crowd backed a little until it felt the pressure of the people behind.

"Take out your gun, Tommy," I ordered. "Two guns look bigger than one."

But Tommy didn't seem to hear me. His eyes were wide and his tongue flicked over dry lips.

I stared at him for a moment and then I fired my gun twice into the air. The crowd retreated a scant yard. I could see the glint of pocket knives and Gillie strained at my hand, shouting encouragement to the twisted faces.

The woman in the doorway shrilled again and there was an answering road from the mob.

I raised my gun quickly and fired. The bullet was a hornet past her ear and she screamed with fright as she leaped back out of sight.

My eyes went back to the dark faces and I was choosing my next target—the loudest one of them, the biggest, the one who would fall the hardest.

And then I finally heard it. The sound of the sirens. Somebody had called the station. Probably somebody with a job who didn't hate as much as the others.

And the mob heard the sirens too. Heads cocked slightly as it listened and blades were closed and slipped back into pockets.

In fifteen seconds the first squad car eased through the crowd, and then there was another, and still more.

The crowd cursed and spat, but things were different now. Nobody was going to rush us. Nobody was going to tear us apart.

We began to break up the mob and now Tommy Dade helped. He took out his gun and there was authority in his voice. He put his hand on chest and he shoved.

The patrol wagon came for Gillie and that helped. And we arrested some of the louder ones and that helped too. The crowd drifted away.

At two o'clock Tommy and I were alone again.

He stood looking down the deserted street, his eyes narrowed. There was the distant rumble of thunder, but I doubted if it would rain here in the city.

I tapped Tommy on the shoulder. "You can put your gun away now. There's nobody left."

At four in the morning we returned to the station to sign out. The streets had lost some of their darkness to the new dawn and the air was cooler. But I knew that was temporary. Later it would be hot and sticky and hard sleeping weather.

We walked to the bus stop and Tommy grinned. "You have this kind of excitement every night?" he asked.

"No," I said. "In the winter it's too cold. People stay inside."

I looked down Sixth street and I could see the dark corner towers of the Graham building. It was still impressive. If you didn't get too close.

It was the house I was born in. On the third floor, in the servants' quarters.

The bus came and Tommy got aboard. I watched it for a block. When it got to Eighteenth the neighborhood would start turning mostly white.

By Twenty-seventh it would be all white and Tommy Dade would be among people whose faces were the same color as his own.

I crossed the street and began walking toward the rooming house where I lived.

I would sleep among my own people too.